



Preacher's Pen

by Gene McCoy

FAMILY PERISHES DESPITE WARNING

MANHATTAN— A woman and her children perished in a tenement house fire on the lower east side last night, despite the advance warning of the Fire Chief. Only days before had the Fire Chief visited tenants in the building to recommend upgrades in the fire prevention protocol. The fire chief recalls with great regret his visit with the deceased. “I explained the danger and provided information by which to correct the situation,” the Chief said. “She acknowledged my warnings, saying she fully intended to implement the recommended changes. But she wanted to wait until her parents made a decision about the upgrades in their apartment.” The Chief then noted that the woman’s parents also died in the fire.

Adding to the tragedy is the fact that a neighboring tenant had been teaching the deceased mother about salvation that is offered through Jesus. Although the mother assured her neighbor that she understood the simple gospel of grace, she postponed her response to receive God’s forgiveness until such time that her parents were ready to make their commitment to Christ.

Asked for further comment, the Fire Chief added, “I feel like I failed this family. I apparently did not make the danger real enough. I wish I had been more insistent.” Interestingly, the evangelistic neighbor’s reactions paralleled the Fire Chief’s.

Discuss

1. Whom did the woman love more—Jesus or her parents?
2. How would you characterize the woman’s decision?
3. What would you have said in response to the woman’s decision?
4. What will the woman say when she stands before God in judgment?
5. What will God say to the woman?
6. How would you counsel the distraught Fire Chief? Neighbor?
7. Who are you warning about the impending fire?
8. How are you preparing yourself to help people avoid this tragedy?

EZEKIEL 33:4-11, 17-21 NLT

⁴Then he said, “Son of man, go to the people of Israel and give them my messages. ⁵I am not sending you to a foreign people whose language you cannot understand. ⁶No, I am not sending you to people with strange and difficult speech. If I did, they would listen! ⁷But the people of Israel won’t listen to you any more than they listen to me! For the whole lot of them are hard-hearted and stubborn. ⁸But look, I have made you as obstinate and hard-hearted as they are. ⁹I have made your forehead as hard as the hardest rock! So don’t be afraid of them or fear their angry looks, even though they are rebels.”

¹⁰Then he added, “Son of man, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first. Listen to them carefully for yourself.

¹¹Then go to your people in exile and say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says!’ Do this whether they listen to you or not.”

¹⁷“Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for Israel. Whenever you receive a message from me, warn people immediately. ¹⁸If I warn the wicked, saying, ‘You are under the penalty of death,’ but you fail to deliver the warning, they will die in their sins. And I will hold you responsible for their deaths. ¹⁹If you warn them and they refuse to repent and keep on sinning, they will die in their sins. But you will have saved yourself because you obeyed me.

²⁰“If righteous people turn away from their righteous behavior and ignore the obstacles I put in their way, they will die. And if you do not warn them, they will die in their sins. None of their righteous acts will be remembered, and I will hold you responsible for their deaths. ²¹But if you warn righteous people not to sin and they listen to you and do not sin, they will live, and you will have saved yourself, too.”